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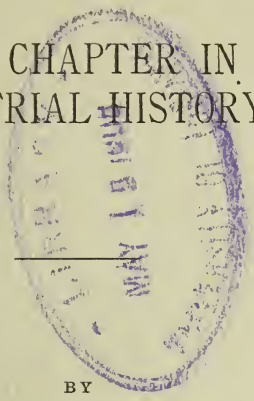
CHARTISM—A CHAPTER IN ENGLISH INDUSTRIAL HISTORY



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FROM THE TRANSACTIONS OF THE WISCONSIN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, ARTS, AND LETTERS, VOL. XII, pp. 509-529

[*Issued October, 1899, in advance of general publication*]

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CHARTISM—A CHAPTER IN ENGLISH INDUSTRIAL HISTORY.[1]

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Chartism stands for an important though somewhat indefinite part of the great industrial revolution of England. It had its roots in economics, its manifestations in politics. It was an agitation of the masses. To understand chartism we must first look into the causes which set the masses in motion.

GENERAL CONDITIONS.

At the opening of the nineteenth century England was changing from an agricultural to a manufacturing nation. The transitional period was one of suffering and uncertainty and of ill-directed attempts at reform. One of the most important facts of England's condition was perhaps the high price of food. Living expenses were high compared with what they had previously been. This was due to the war with France and to a gradual increase of the population above what the agricultural resources of the country would support. These high prices were but one symptom of the fundamental industrial change which was taking place.

The growth of the factory system had already stranded many hand producers and antiquated the skill of many artisans. It

[1] General references: File of the Northern Star, of Cooper's Journal, and of Politics for the People; Martineau, History of the Peace, Vol. IV.; Knight, History of England, Vol. VII.; Tooke, History of Prices; Hodder, Life and Works of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury; Engel, Condition of the Working Classes in England in 1844; McCarthy, History of Our Own Times; Carlyle, Chartism; Kingsley, Alton Locke and Yeast; Besant, All Sorts and Conditions of Men; Reade, Put Yourself in His Place. Articles: Frazer's Magazine, Vol. 37, May, 1848; Eclectic Review, Vol. 23; Blackwood's Magazine, Vol. 63, June, 1848; Century Magazine, Vol. I.

developed the power of masses of capital before labor learned to mass itself wisely for resistance. The ethical and social aspects of the new method of production, as it built itself upon the ruins of the old order, were anything but encouraging.

The gathering of workmen together in factory towns, made up of one class of population, took them away from the villages and country districts where there had been some sort of friendly social intercourse between themselves and the middle classes and the local landlords. In the "Deserted Village," which Goldsmith mourned, they had known and respected the personal life of the village parson, and they had themselves been considered as friends and neighbors and not merely as one of the costs of production. When the wage-earners passed into the factories their dwellings were huddled together in separate quarters of large cities. Lord John Russell said in a speech in Parliament, describing the great manufacturing and mining districts of England: "The mass of the people there were constituted of one great working class and of the few individuals by whom they were employed, and who had but little connection with them of the sort calculated to produce that species of subordination which prevailed in other communities. In those districts of the country there were not those means of religious and moral instruction which were required for knitting men together in society." There was great promiscuity both as to living and sleeping rooms. The overpopulation of certain city districts resulted in dirty streets and imperfect sewerage. There was a lack of parks and playgrounds for children. There was little opportunity for recreation of any sort except such as could be made to support vicious institutions. Prices of edibles rose so high that huxters were known to have done a thriving business in selling putrid meats and decayed vegetables. Such articles even found their way into city markets, for the inspection was not as rigid as it is at present. Cheap clothing of rotten shoddy fibre took the place of the warm and durable homespuns.[1] The

[1] Carlyle described the clothing of the poorer classes thus: "They wear a suit of tatters, the getting on or off which is said to be a difficult operation, transacted only at festivals and the high tides of the calendar."

large agglomerations of poor and ignorant persons in manufacturing towns furnished the prey for dishonest production and pettifogging trade. Lack of shrewdness and ready money kept the laborer a victim of the tradesman. Physical ailments, unpleasant homes, and ignorance gave the liquor traffic a disastrous hold upon those who were least able to squander their earnings. For an English laborer, the years of life, beyond those of self-supporting activity, were almost certain to be spent in an almshouse. The end was a pauper's grave. The conditions of the agricultural districts were not so bad though the scenes presented in Chas. Kingsley's *Alton Locke* and *Yeast* are anything but pleasing. "There was not so much to complain at in the laws," wrote one farmer to a people's paper, "except perhaps the poor laws, but at certain customs which had outlived their time and which bore down with crushing weight upon the laborers."

Before the close of the war with France, bread was at famine rates and wages at their lowest. The working classes were forced down into a position of destitution from which it later took the most determined efforts to raise them. The landed aristocracy were strongly intrenched in the government and were grasping enough to desire to continue war prices, for agricultural products, after the war was over. For a time the corn laws were manipulated to produce this effect.

In addition to what has been mentioned there were other discouraging features in the situation of England at the opening of the century. The evil possibilities of unwise laws were fully exhibited in the workings of the English poor law. The statute upon which this rested, the 43d Elizabeth of 1601, has achieved a really historic notoriety. The intention of this law was a commendable one, namely, to furnish work for the poor. But in the early part of this century the administration of the law, in the hands of ignorant and selfish local officials, was utterly incompetent. Work was not provided as the act originally contemplated, but money was given to the poor and that without due investigation. Too large an allowance was given to parents to support children, and more was given to support illegitimate than legitimate children. Thus poverty became an engine to

break down prudence and virtue. Notwithstanding that money was unwisely given, the system set one parish against another and put each on the watch to shift its burdens as far as possible upon other parishes. This, together with strict laws of settlement, for a time prevented the free movement of labor. But by 1795 the strictness of the laws of settlement was relaxed and the England of the period we are considering was characterized by migrations of the lower strata of society. The English poor laws were not reconstructed until 1834. During that year the total poor rate of England was £6,317,254, while in 1836, under the new system, it was only £4,717,629. The old law took away some of the most necessary restraints upon the increase of population and was the instrument in building up an industrially superfluous class, composed of improvident persons, brought up with the utmost negligence, and left to prey upon society through one of two alternatives; pauperism or crime.

It must be remembered in connection with these things that there seemed to be little or no hope of obtaining relief through government. Parliament was dominated by the landed aristocracy, which was not concerned with the troubles of the manufacturing population. At this time Parliament was probably more often thought of as a council to assist the King than as a body to represent and act for the people. The political situation abroad was also calculated to arouse uneasiness. The people of Europe were demanding constitutions on all sides and monarchs were constrained to protect themselves through the union which the Holy Alliance afforded.

As to the church, "Parson Lot" (Chas. Kingsley) and, somewhat later, many others admitted that the Bible had been used "as a mere opium-dose for keeping beasts of burden patient while they were being overloaded." The sufferings of England awakened Shelley, beyond the Alps, and impelled him to write in 1819, a most vigorous protest, though in rather poor verse, entitled "The Masque of Anarchy." The poet demands that there shall be a great assemblage where the poor and their oppressors shall meet and the former shall triumph by the force of the majesty of their presence and the justice of their claims. This poetic

picture often served as an inspiration to chartist meetings later on. This, then, was the soil in which Chartism grew.

CHARTISM AND THE REFORM BILL.

The Chartists were always deeply concerned with the movement toward popular representation in parliament and the enfranchisement of the masses. Agitation along these lines was early begun in England. This movement passed through many stages of its evolution before Chartism became an influence in it. As early as 1783 a committee, of which Chas. J. Fox was chairman, was selected by the electors of Westminster to draw up a statement of desired political reforms. This committee, in their report, produced a truly noteworthy document. They recommended annual parliaments, universal suffrage (by this term was meant manhood suffrage), equal voting districts, no property qualifications for seat in the Commons, voting by ballot, and the payment of the members of parliament. This was not only progressive for its time but it anticipated the points of the "People's Charter" from which Chartism was named. In 1792 there was founded a "Society of Friends of the People" which was active in pushing the reform bills and which sympathized with the wage earning classes in their sufferings. To this society belonged Chas. (later Earl) Grey, James Mackintosh, and others equally prominent.

As a result of distressing economic conditions and political appeals to the masses, in connection with the suffrage, a general ferment began to work in the lower orders of society. The first evidence of this was a general increase in crime. There were frequent explosions in factories. The property of employers was burned and assaults were made upon disliked persons. General depredations became of annoying frequence in the manufacturing centers of the country. The "Henry Hunt Movement," at this time prominent, was characterized by frequent outbreaks of violence. Associations sprang up amongst workmen all over England. Their methods were in most cases secret and must be admitted to have been frequently unlawful. It is known that prices were sometimes set on the head of

"knobsticks," as workmen who took the place of strikers were called. Arrangements were made for preventing the use of machinery and persecuting employers in numerous ways.[1] But all this was hardly more than mere ruffianism though the causes of it were serious enough.

The economic distress of the time stirred up the lower elements of society to revolt. The direction which their first definite movement took was determined by the prevailing ideas of the time. Political reform was in the wind and they threw themselves in line with it. The first stage of Chartism was involved in the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832. The discussion of this question occupied the arena of public thought when suffering drove the factory and farm hands of England to take up their own cause. To draw these ignorant classes into their campaign was an easy matter for the Whig defenders of the Reform Bill. In this way they severed Chartism from the issues we should have expected it to represent and made out of it a sort of tail-piece to the Whig reforms of the early thirties. The Whigs were frequently accused of filling their political sails with the rising storm of popular impatience and, when later it passed out of their control, they were roundly denounced by the conservatives for having, as they thought, conjured it up.

The puzzle of Chartism lies in the fact that though the grievances of the average Chartist sympathizers were economic, the movement they supported was persistently devoted to the extension of the suffrage. The causal connection between economic injustice and the indifference and aristocracy of government was not doubted by Chartists. They expected through government to set economic matters right. We have evidence here how little serious influence *laissez-faire* ever existed with the English workmen. The politics of the Chartists were, as Adolf Held said, purely a "magenfrage."[2] Rev. Stevens, one of the Chartist leaders, when addressing a vast crowd of men at Kersall Moor, near Manchester, said: "Chartism, my friends, is no political movement, where the main point is your getting

[1] Chas. Reade, *Put Yourself in His Place.*

[2] *Sozialismus und Sozialdemokratie*, p. 87.

the ballot. Chartism is a knife and fork question: the Charter means a good house, good food and drink, prosperity, and short working hours."

The first Reform Bill was introduced into Parliament in 1831. It contemplated three great changes: I. Abolition of rotten boroughs, II. Representation for large towns, III. A wider and more equal distribution of the franchise. It was opposed by the lords, the clergy, the army and navy, the Inns of court, and the universities. It was favored by the press, the manufacturing interests, and the masses generally. The struggle in Parliament was intense. When the bill was carried in the Commons by a small plurality the issue was taken to the people. The new Parliament, largely reform in its sympathies, took up the matter in a new bill. This was discussed until just before the coronation of King William IV., when it was carried by the House of Commons and rejected by the lords. Excitement at this time was very high. Parliament was prorogued for a month. Peers were frequently attacked on the streets. Sixty thousand persons petitioned the King in behalf of the bill. Conspiracies were so numerous that it was found necessary to prohibit political associations by proclamation. Riots occurred all over the country. Extreme doctrines of every sort were readily listened to. Every shade of socialism and anarchism appeared.[1] The more ignorant classes resorted to violence as usual. When Parliament met under the new reign a third bill was introduced. This being amended by the Lords, the King was asked to authorize the creation of new peers. When he hesitated the ministry resigned. The opposition was, however, not able to form a government. Grey was summoned to return and the creation of new peers was authorized. The lords immediately withdrew their opposition and the bill was finally passed in June of 1832.

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[1] R. Pauli *Staatengeschichte der Neusten Zeit*, II, 80. In 1831 the red flag of anarchism was carried in English riots. Chartist papers long urged that the land of England should be made public property and that various industries should be socially managed when the government should become sufficiently democratic.

PERIOD OF SUSPENSE.

So long as the Whigs pushed the Reform Bills vigorously the forces of Chartism were content to remain an unorganized element in their following. But the time came when the leaders of the party thought they had gone far enough. The majority of their constituencies abided by their decision, but the unenfranchised classes, an element untutored in the art of party compromise and never before dealt with by English politicians, were not so docile. However, they stayed action for a time to see what the effects of the new measures would be. The Parliaments returned under the new franchise law were liberal in their tendencies and accomplished many things in the next few years, though they were such things as did not bring immediate and tangible results to the wage-earning classes. Some abuses connected with the church were corrected; the privileges of the East India Company were removed, and slavery was abolished in the British Empire. Liberal grants were made for educational purposes; the poor laws were amended and many industrial restrictions were removed. The agitation for the freedom of the press was at this time fought through. The people waited for the material results of these reforms. There was a short breathing spell. But they were at no time entirely satisfied with what had been done and they waited in distrust. It was still complained that but one man in seven had the right of suffrage. The Whig leaders were pressed to carry forward the work begun. The cry of "traitor!" was raised when they declared that they would go no further. A writer in *Blackwoods Magazine*, discussing the discontent of the period said: " What is the prevailing cry of the Chartists and universal suffrage men? It is that they have not obtained the fruits of reform; that they have been misled and deceived by their Whig leaders; that all the real and practical grievances of which they formerly complained are still in existence; that wages are as low, provisions as high, taxes as heavy as ever, that the sway of the middle classes has proved more oppressive than ever that of the old borough-mongers; and that the new poor-law has deprived them of their rights of birthright inheritance in a way which

would never have been attempted by the ancient guardians of the realm." The reforms inaugurated did not affect the economic life of the masses to their satisfaction. The Chartists had only to look about at home to see that the "knife and fork" question had not been solved. Agitation and violence soon began again.

FIRST PERIOD OF INDEPENDENT CHARTIST ACTIVITY.

After the Whigs completed in 1832 what they had to do in regard to the suffrage, Chartism for the first time became a distinct movement. Chartists were dissatified with what had been done but, peculiarly enough, continued along precisely the same lines of agitation. They even refused to be drawn into combination with the Whigs for the repeal of the Corn Laws or to help push through the bill for a ten hour day.

Throughout this whole history there can be distinguished two elements. There are two distinct sources of discontent, two classes of people, and two types of policy. On the one side was a movement for more liberal government, begun as a theory, developed as a political movement in the hands of the Whigs, continued as an unsatisfied agitation for universal suffrage, and ending in a gradual and natural evolution. On the other side the economic conditions aroused the massess to a revolt which was amorphic and spasmodic and attended with much violence. Its history embraces the activity of many mobs and rioters, of secret organizations of workingmen, and of a few radical clubs and societies. Partaking of the nature of each of these was the "Henry Hunt Movement" which was active for fifteen years before it became a part of Chartism in 1837. It is easy to see that there would be a lack of harmony between these two elements. To one class political reform was an end, to the other a means. These factions worried along together for several years; but the differences in spirit and aim became too evident to ignore. A separation was inevitable. It came over the question of the means proper to employ in carrying on agitation. The Universal Suffragists desired a law abiding agitation of a political character and became "Moral Force" chartists.

The Huntists were for fair words only so long as they would prevail and they became "Physical Force" chartists. The first element was the brains, the second the body of the movement.

Let us first follow the Moral Force chartists. The Universal Suffragists formulated their demands at once upon the passage of the Reform Bill and they pursued a steady consistent policy in advocating their ideas. There were many semi-political societies existing among the unenfranchised. One of the most prominent of these was the National Union of the Working Classes at London. In this Union was Henry Hetherington who was in a sense its leader. He has been credited with being the pioneer of the outspoken part of Chartism. He, with William Lovett, James Watson, and others, was for an educational campaign only and decried the use of violence. A set of principles was drawn up by Hetherington and his followers in the National Union. It was used by the framers of the "People's Charter" and contained the following points:

The right to all honestly acquired property is sacred.

The recognition of the equality of men and of certain natural rights is the only just foundation upon which government can rest.

All hereditary distinctions are unjust.

The suffrage should include every law-abiding adult male of sound mind.

In order to secure proper representatives voting should be by ballot.

Parliaments should be elected for but one year.

These principles were declared to be essential to the protection of the workingmen and no reforms were to be considered satisfactory which did not embody them.

In 1837 the same Union drew up a petition to be presented to Parliament. It was prepared by Mr. Hetherington and was signed by 3,000 persons. Later in the year a conference was held with some of the liberal members of the House of Commons. At this conference twelve persons were selected to draw up a bill which was to be introduced in Parliament. On the committee were six members of Parliament, among whom were Daniel O'Connell and John A. Roebuck. As deputies of the

workingmen there were Henry Hetherington, John Cleave, James Watson, Richard Moore, William Lovett, and John Vincent. Lovett wrote the document and Roebuck, who introduced it in Parliament, advised on legal points. The draft of the bill was endorsed far and wide by labor and other organizations and became the famous "People's Charter." The principal points of this bill were the same as those embodied in the report of Chas. Fox to the electors of Westminster in 1780. They were:

I. Manhood suffrage.
II. Annual parliaments.
III. Vote by ballot.
IV. Abolition of property qualification for seats in Parliament.
V. Payment of members of Parliament.
VI. Division of the country into equal electoral districts.

Three of these six points have since been practically realized, namely: manhood suffrage, vote by ballot, and abolition of property qualification. The division of the country into equal electoral districts has been practically realized. The remaining two demands, one for annual parliaments, the other for payment of members, do not seem to be vital points under the present system.[1] This petition, composed of as reasonable a series of demands as it was, and backed by a lively popular sentiment, was almost entirely ignored by the statesmen and prominent thinkers of the day. Leigh Hunt, Carlyle, Kingsley, and a few others only seemed to realize its significance and to understand the meaning of the struggles of the time.

The next move after drawing up the bill was to bring pressure to bear upon Parliament to consider it. A petition was accordingly set on foot. A national convention of Chartists was called to meet at London in 1838. Delegates to the number of fifty-three assembled. The convention was composed of Moral Force Chartists and proved to be a temperate and sensible body. A public statement of principles was made and arrangements completed for presenting their petition to the House of Commons.

[1] In 1892 (March 25) a resolution looking toward payment of members was lost in the House of Commons by 272 to 162 votes. This demand is a plank in the platform of the English Socialistic Labor Party.

In this all classes of Chartists joined. When the huge mass of paper was rolled into the House, Mr. Atwood, who acted as the delegate of the Chartists, was allowed, contrary to precedent, to make a speech in presenting it. But all this produced no appreciable effect. The Commons scarcely noticed the bill or the petition. A move to consider them was defeated by a majority of 189 in a House of 281 members. The Chartists became discouraged. Meanwhile the actions of the Physical Force wing of the agitation so disgusted the better classes of society that the entire movement was discredited. Universal suffragists refrained henceforth from taking active part in any kind of demonstrations.

The Physical Force wing was always unable to pursue any systematic campaign. Its fortunes rose and fell with the increase and decrease of misery. So when in 1836 English trade began to show signs of distress, the effect was soon appreciated by agitators and demagogues. The scant harvests of 1836 and the extreme severity of the winter of 1836–37, followed as it was by unheard of frost and snow in the middle of summer, caused great distress. Strikes became numerous and through them the workmen's associations took occasion to thrust their political grievances into notice. Meetings were held at which the most inflammatory language was used. Often Chartists came together after sunset, with torches, and were addressed by such leaders as Feargus O'Connor, Earnest Jones, John Frost, and Stevens. These meetings were more than once followed by barn and hay-rick burnings and by attacks upon the local police. In the summer of 1839 there were almost constant outbreaks at Birmingham, Sheffield, and other manufacturing centers. Of the condition of popular sentiment in England at this time Carlyle said: "Sullen, revengeful humor of revolt against the upper classes, decreasing respect for what their temporal superiors command, decreasing faith in what their spiritual superiors teach, is more and more the universal spirit of the lower classes." The period lying between the years 1838 and 1840 has often been designated "The Dark Times."

The leader of Physical Force Chartism was Feargus O'Connor, a gigantic Irishman, of outspoken manner and great enterprise

and activity. He was an enthusiastic speaker and was possessed of a disposition that made him the natural leader of the more boisterous element. He was the proprietor and editor of the *Northern Star* and the originator and director of the National Land Co., a scheme for home colonization, which got no further than to use for campaign purposes the subscriptions paid in to it by workingmen. O'Connor was elected to Parliament for Nottingham in 1847 and he kept up a vigorous attack in the House of Commons and addressed mass-meetings all over England.

One method of the Chartists of this period was to attend city churches in large numbers, marching in ranks to and from the services. They often wore badges and usually sat as nearly in a body as possible, their aim being to attract attention to themselves and their condition. Upon one occasion a body of Chartists in Manchester ventured to send directions to the pastor of the Old Church, from what text he should preach. On the following Sunday the church was packed by Chartists but, when the text was announced, they arose in a body and left. The preacher had not taken their text but chose the passage "My house is the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves."

When the year 1840 was passed the most dangerous years of Chartism were over. Plentiful harvests came again. The distress passed from trade. The government which had been waiting for excitement to subside, in order that juries might be gotten to convict, asserted itself and many Chartist leaders were imprisoned. Others left the country.

THE PARADE OF 1848.

Throughout the first few years of the forties the forces of Chartism worked only in a quiet way. The evolution was a silent one molding men's minds and preparing them for the reforms which were to come after the turbulence of 1848 should have passed away. The withdrawal of the Moral Force element from Chartism was the decapitation of the movement; yet the corpse was, by a mighty effort, galvanized into a state of ap-

parent life and activity. The demonstration of 1848 belongs to the history of Physical Force Chartism.

At a time when there was in England a seeming lull in affairs and when there was no great question before the country, the fall of the monarchy of Louis Philippe in France was announced. The frantic republicanism of the victors spread like a contagion all over Europe. The year 1848 is known as the year of revolutions. There were insurrections in Sicily (as usual) and in Italy. There was fighting in Austria and anarchism and socialism in Berlin. The Irish revolted and serious conflicts took place between the Orangemen and Roman Catholics.[1] It was but natural that a certain class of Chartists should feel a quickening of the pulse. Many looked upon the actions of the French Republicans as an example which, as they often hinted, circumstances might compel them to follow. It was planned to hold a great conference in London in March of 1848. Arrangements were there made for gathering the signatures to a monster petition which should eclipse all former ones and should be presented to Parliament calling for the passage of the People's Charter. While this petition was circulating excitement was kept up by meetings, many of which were riotous. Over-heated speakers were continually making threats that England would see trouble if the petition was ignored. The government took warning from the disturbances on the Continent and was on the alert. As early as the middle of March the practice had become general, in the largest cities, to swear in special constables. Large bodies of men were provided for London, Manchester, and Glasgow. *Punch* said the government of England consisted of the special constabulary. Succeeding the March convention an assembly of Chartist delegates, forty-nine in number, came together in London on the first of April. This convention decided upon a grand spectacular movement. All Chartists were summoned to come to London, on the tenth of April, and assemble on Kennington Common. From there, in vast array, they were to carry their petition to the House of Commons and urge its acceptance, as Shelley would have said, "by the majesty of their presence." Chartist leaders made themselves believe that their

[1] At Dolly's Bray, Ireland.

cause could not fail of success. They thought that the people were on their side and hence the English government would either be peacefully reconstructed according to their demands or else that, after a short and ineffectual resistance, it would pass entirely into their hands. They even discussed in convention what they should do when they came into control. They determined, among other things, that they would "divide the land into small farms and give every man an opportunity to get his living by the sweat of his brow." The Chartists alleged that they had secured the signatures of 5,706,000 persons to their petition. The proceedings of the convention verged upon open conspiracy. The sentiment was, that if peaceful means would not prevail the time had come for drastic measures. The plan of action formulated by the convention was, that if Parliament ignored the petition that was to be sent to it, the Queen should be commanded (to use their phrase) to prorogue Parliament and call to her aid such ministers as would make the "People's Charter" a cabinet measure. Whether this command was obeyed by Her Royal Highness or not, on Good Friday, April twenty-first, elections should be held throughout England to choose delegates to a National Assembly. This should convene in London, Monday, April twenty-fourth and remain sitting until the "People's Charter" should be made the law of the land. In other words, if necessary, this assembly should constitute a revolutionary government and constitutional convention.

On the sixth of April the government issued a proclamation forbidding the Chartist procession which was announced for the tenth following and also forbidding any meeting to be held by the Chartists. For the authority of the latter part of their proclamation they went back to an obsolete but unrepealed statute of Charles II., passed in 1661, immediately after the Restoration, and which was for the temporary purpose of crushing the numerous conspiracies of that time. The government was criticised, even by conservatives, for resurrecting this antiquated bit of legislation; no serious attempt was made to enforce it. On the seventh, the public offices of London were supplied with arms in anticipation of a chartist outbreak.

Special constables to the number of about 150,000 were sworn in. The parapets of the Bank of England were fortified with sand bags, and detachments of the regular army were placed behind them.

When the fated tenth arrived the Chartist leaders met at nine o'clock in the morning, in the rooms of the Literary and Scientific Institute, Fitzroy Square. Many wore in their hats cockades of red, white, and green ribbon, the Chartist colors. The crowd that naturally assembled in Fitzroy Square, before proceeding to the appointed meeting place, was addressed by Chartist speakers. O'Connor, the acknowledged head of the movement and the one always depended upon for fire and enthusiasm, was loudly called for. On this occasion, to the surprise of everybody, he took up much of his time explaining that he was really unwell, and had a doctor's certificate which would entitle him to stay at home. He urged the Chartists not to come into conflict with the authorities, who were armed to the teeth and who, he said, were thirsting for their blood. Finally he asked them to forbear for his sake, as he had received many warning letters to the effect, that the authorities would first of all fire upon him.[1] Earnest Jones, of more fiery temper, followed with a speech in which he expressed much surprise that at the last minute they should be counseled to back down. The crowd was divided in opinion. Thus, through hesitancy and disagreement, what might have ended in a revolution did not even produce an effective mob.

The officers of the organization repaired to the place of meeting riding in a highly decorated car. Kennington Common is south of the Parliament Houses and across the river from them. They crossed the river, probably by the Vauxhall Bridge, and carried with them the petition which comprised five huge bales or bundles of paper. The hundreds of thousands of people who were summoned from all parts of England did not appear. Reliable estimates made by army officers placed the number at from fifteen to twenty thousand. Upon attempting to form for the procession the leaders were stopped by the police and the

[1] He promised to worry the government into accepting the charter by constantly asking questions about it in the House of Commons.

crowd was thrown into confusion. It was found furthermore that the police were in posession of all the city bridges and that they were thus shut off from the north side of the river and from the Parliament buildings.[1] They cursed their stupidity in choosing so unfortunate a location. The leaders being humiliated desired nothing so much as to get out of sight and court retirement. The crowd gradually dispersed and sought consolation, for the remainder of the day, in the ale houses. There was no procession and after everthing had settled down, the bales of petition were quietly carted to the Parliament Houses. On the north side of the river, in the city, all was orderly. No soldiers appeared in public. The special police paraded up and down all day through nearly deserted streets. The city was more than usually quiet.

The petition was examined by government clerks and found to contain 1,975,496 signatures. Many sheets of these were utterly worthless, either showing the same handwriting or filled with preposterous names. Such signatures as "The Queen," "The Prince of Wales" were found among "Harry the Tar" and the names of favorite characters of fiction. The *Illustrated London News* in the first issue after April tenth said: "Mr. Feargus O'Connor has shown that quality which was as good as valor in Sir John Falstaff and which was still better than valor in him — discretion. . . . Three hundred thousand Chartists summoned to Kennington Common have dwindled down to fifteen thousand. The mountain has laboured, the mouse has been born."

The ridiculous character of this demonstration killed Chartism as an organized power. It did not however alter the main movement of reform in which Chartism has a place. The impulses which so long found expression through Chartism ultimately passed into other lines and gave constituency to various reforms. The Earl of Shaftesbury wrote in his private diary under the entry bearing the date April 13, 1848: "Men are talking, they know not why, and they do not reflect *how*, of *this* slight concession and *that;* of an 'enlargement of the franchise,'

[1] From twelve o'clock noon, until four o'clock in the afternoon no one was allowed to cross the bridges from the Surrey side of London.

and other vagaries. No one, except the Chartists, has asked for it, and they will rest satisfied with nothing short of the whole. The middle classes are content, and so are nineteen-twentieths of the working people; but this will be of no avail against indistinct terrors, ignorant uneasiness, and speculative, not social, policy. A sanitary bill would, in five years, confer more blessing and obliterate more Chartism than universal suffrage in half a century; but the world, when ill at ease, flies always to politics, and omits the statistics of the chimney-corner, where all a man's comfort or discomfort lies."[1] There is a good deal of wisdom in this comment but no one now thinks of calling the movement for the "enlargement of the franchise" which so fundamentally reconstructed English government, a "vagary." To the argument of this extract it is only fair to append the Chartists' answer which might assume the form of a question: What chance of success would a sanitation bill or any other radical measure of reform have had in the old aristocratic Parliament supported by a restricted suffrage?

The violence of the French Revolution ended Chartism by opening the eyes of the more conservative and reasonable classes of England to the dangers toward which extremists were leading agitation. It precipitated the division of society into two classes; on the one hand, those who felt they had more to gain than to lose by the maintenance of the existing order, and, on the other, such as believed they could improve their fortunes by revolution. As soon as this destinction was clearly drawn Chartism was at an end.

Chartism introduced the masses to the larger issues of social and political life, and it is not to be wondered at if they blundered after the fashion of a player learning a new game. It must not be forgotton also that many criminal and violent men and many demagogues preyed upon the Chartist movement. We should discriminate their acts from the acts and opinions of the majority. A few turbulent Physical Force leaders engineered the farce of 1848; the majority staid quietly at home. A view of Chartism to some degree sympathetic, is necessary to enable

[1] Hodder, "Life, etc." p. 393.

us to understand the sympathy and support which the cause received from a few of the choicest spirits of the age in which it occurred.

INFLUENCE OF CHARTISM.

When Chartism passed away the Liberal Party fell heir to much of its constituency. The effect of this was noticeable in the progressive policy soon adopted by that party. It is impossible to consider that the influence of Chartism ceased entirely with the year 1848. It fallowed the ground, so to speak, for subsequent reforms. One evidence of this is the luxuriant growth of newspapers and periodicals and debating clubs of all sorts that sprang up for a time advocating every sort of reform. Most of these were short-lived, it is true, but they evinced the breaking up of traditional lines of thought. There was, for example, the penny periodical entitled "Politics for the People" advocating sanitary reform, extension of parks and general municipal reform, education and socialized religion. The weekly entitled "The People" advertised itself as the advocate of reform in general, seeking to promote the free and full development of the whole human being. To this end it advocated teetotalism, dietetics, and the healing art, phonography, phrenology, and reform in theology. As may be seen from such an announcement, pretty much every line of thought was shaken up at this time. It could scarcely be but that progress would result in some of the many directions which inquiry took. Those supporters of Chartism who passed into the Liberal Party turned the government to the serious consideration of economic problems. Another portion aided in the regeneration of the English clergy. The Tractarian movement displayed as a central thought the yearning to recover for the church its leadership and to make it worthy to revive the idea of the fatherhood of the church toward its members. The people had shown themselves to be like sheep without a shepherd while the church primates had, from the seats of the scornful, exercised only a negative influence. Another closely allied line of reform, the Young England Movement, was toward re-establishing intimate relations between the aristocracy and the common people.

It aimed to reinstate that ancient condition in which the nobility were the friends, advisors, and leaders of the people. The agitation for universal suffrage was carried on with moderation by two influential societies formed after 1848; The People's League for Manhood Suffrage and The People's Party of Parliamentary Reform. The great hobby proposed as a counter influence by the opponents of Chartism, during its later stages, was foreign colonization. The London *Times*, the Glasgow *Daily Mail*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, and other influential publications urged the colonization of Canada and other English possessions. When the government was making arrests in the latter part of 1848, some of the Physical Force leaders personally took up with this idea with amazing alacrity.

Chartism shows us that movements for reform which begin in the lower orders of society, are often born of physical misery, and progress or recede as that fluctuates. The things agitated for in campaigns so begun have often little connection with the causes of the afflicting evils. Chartism shows us, as does many another popular agitation, the results which always follow from a lack of competent leadership. Several of the leaders of Physical Force Chartism were suspicioned, on good grounds, to have been insane. When the intelligent classes are arrayed upon one side and the ignorant upon the other, even though the latter may be numerically very strong, they cannot hope for permanent success. Popular movements often make the mistake of defying rather than attempting to educate and conciliate their non-sympathisers. Narrow minds proverbially overestimate the differences that exist between individuals and classes because of a failure to grasp fully enough the idea of a common human nature. Chartism opened the eyes of England to the fact that the upper classes owe a duty of intelligent leadership and assistance to those among whom they live. Any criticism of the Chartists for confounding liberty and license strikes back against the classes who failed to see that power and rank and wealth imply duty. Chartism demonstrated the solidarity existing between social reforms. An advance in politics, economics, education, or religion depends in a measure upon the status of each of the others, and each feels an impulse from an advance in any

other. Especially is the close connection between political and ethical progress pointed out; for the one irreconcilable contradiction of Chartism was, that through violence the people were not showing themselves capable of taking a part in government but quite the contrary.

Madison, Wis., December, 1898.

Pamph Jones, E. D.
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